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THE DIRGE OF COHELETH.

(Continued from Vol. IV., p. 549.)

THE Dirge theory finds in Eccl. xii. 3-5 a description of a man's earthly house in the day of his death. In that day the keepers of the *house* tremble, because the man is going to his eternal *house*, and the mourners go about in the street. In the *Dirge* I noticed the "semi-literal" interpretations of J. D. Michaelis and Umbreit, which agree generally in details with the Dirge theory, but suppose the house to be described as at nightfall, or in a storm, the Night and the Storm¹ being symbols of death. Another theory agreeing in details with the Dirge theory as against the anatomists is that of J. G. Wetzstein, noticed in an Excursus to Delitzsch's *Koheleth*, and maintained by the Rev. C. H. H. Wright, D.D., in his learned and comprehensive *Book of Koheleth*, the Donnellan Lectures for 1880-1 (London, 1883), which may always be consulted with profit on questions arising from Ecclesiastes.

THE SEVEN DAYS OF DEATH.

According to this view of Eccl. xii. 1-7, "The imagery employed in the first five verses is drawn from the closing days of the Palestinian winter. The last seven days of that season (though viewed as the heralds of the approaching spring) are peculiarly dreaded in Palestine as fraught with death to persons advanced in years. . . . In the latter days of (February) an after-winter occurs with un-deviating regularity. It lasts generally for seven days, during which the cold is bitterly felt, especially as it

¹ Umbreit's *Sturm* theory was put forward in his *Koheleth's Seelenkampf* (1818), but was not maintained in his later work *Was bleibt?* (1849).

always comes after warm weather. These seven days are noted as dangerous to the aged, and are styled in the native almanacks *the days of the old woman*. . . . Koheleth, as a native of Palestine, must have been well acquainted with these seven *days of death*." The whole passage is divided into seven "stanzas," not exactly corresponding with the verses, and rendered as follows :—

And remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth,

(1.)

Ere there come the days of evil, and years approach
In which thou shalt say, I have no pleasure !

(2.)

Ere the sun is darkened, and the light, and the moon, and the stars,
And the clouds return after the pouring rain.

(3.)

In the day when the keepers of the house tremble,
And the men of strength bow-themselves-together—
And the grinding-maids cease because they are few,
And the ladies that look out at the lattices are darkened !
And doors are shut towards the street,
When the sound of the grinding-mill ceases.

(4.)

When one rises at the voice of the bird
And all the daughters of song are humbled !
Even they fear from on high, and all-sorts-of-terrors are in the
path.

(5.)

Then there blossoms the almond,
And crawls out the locust ;
But unavailing is the caperberry—
For the man is going to his eternal house,
And there go the mourners about in the street !

(6.)

Ere the silver cord be snapped asunder,
And the golden bowl break—
And the pitcher be shivered upon the spring,
And the wheel be broken (and fall) into the well.

(7.)

And ere the dust return upon the earth as it was ;
For the spirit shall return to the God who gave it.

In these seven stanzas allusion is supposed to be made to the *seven days of death* of the Palestinian after-winter. But it is granted that in 6 and 7 there is obviously no such special allusion, and 4 and 5 are said (as below) to describe, not these days, but the days which follow them. There remain, therefore, only the stanzas 1, 2, 3 as possibly descriptive of the seven days. But it cannot be said that the evil days and years of 1, or the darkness and rain of 2, or the consternation and sadness of 3, point definitely to that particular week. Thus it seems that there is no *primâ facie* case for the Seven Days theory.

In the exegesis of the seven stanzas the explanations of 4 and 5 are very questionable. Coheleth in 4, it is said, describes the advent of spring. The after-winter has weakened the old men and women, and they are now dying. While *those yet in the vigour of manhood rise early at the glorious concert of birds, with whose melody the humbled daughters of song cannot compete, the aged sick in their chambers are beset with all sorts of fears from above and below.* Dr. Wright (p. 252) accepts but misapplies the suggestion that the fears *from on high* and *in the path* are fears that encompass "on every side"; for the scene is surely laid out of doors, and the expression "in the path" in particular does not point to the aged sick *in their chambers*. The contrast between the bedridden invalid and the strong man, who "rises *early* at the voice of the bird," is not, so far as I can see, hinted at by the Preacher. And it is not clear what is meant by "the *humbled* daughters of song" in this interpretation. Is it merely that the birds out-sing them, or that, like the old men and women, they have been "brought low" by the week of death? They should rather, like the men in their prime, "rise early," and join in the "glorious concert" of spring (Cant. ii. 10-14). In stanza 5 the rendering *Then . . . And . . . But* etc. is artificial, and the threefold *And* of the A. V. is to be preferred. The meaning of the stanza is ingeniously made to be, that although the almond blossoms

and nature is reawakening from its temporary grave nevertheless *in yon chamber the old man is lying, and even the caperberry cannot arouse his failing appetite.*

Lastly, the passage falls naturally into three sections commencing **עד אשר לא**, *Ere* (verses 1, 2, 6), and into seven verses, as in the Hebrew and the A. V., but not into the seven "stanzas." The verses 3, 4, 5 have each a sense and rhythm which is marred by their reconstruction as stanzas 3, 4, 5. Verse 3 classifies the inmates of the house, and verse 4 contrasts the *voices* of the mill, the bird, and the daughters of song. Verse 5 describes outdoor objects; and it is unreasonable and arbitrary to detach from it its opening clause, "Also when," etc., which so well marks the transition from house to garden, and to make **בדרך**, *in the way*, apply to a person confined to the house, as in stanza 4, which is a patchwork of verses 4*b* and 5*a*,

וַיָּקוּם לְקוֹל הַצִּפּוֹר
וַיִּשְׁחַח כָּל בְּנוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם
גַּם מִגְבֹּלָה יִירָאוּ וְחַתָּמִים בְּדִבְרָה :

If we are to read **וַיָּקוּם**, in the jussive, in dependence upon **ביום ש'** (Wright, page 247), this agrees perhaps rather better with the threefold than with the sevenfold division.

THE MIDRASH.

The Midrash expounds Eccl. xii. 1-7, in two ways: (1) historically in *Echah Rabb.*, *Pelhichta*, § 23, and *Eccl. Rabb.* xii., and (2) anatomically in *Levit. Rabb.* xviii., and *Eccl. Rabb.* xii. Rashi gives both expositions.

(1.) *Verse* 1.—Solomon says to Israel, "And remember thy Creator in the days of **בחורוּתֶיךָ**," or while Israel still remains a chosen people. Then follow Scripture proofs that he *chose* (**בחר**) Israel, David, etc. The "days of evil" are days of captivity (Amos vi. 3-7). *Verse* 2.—The "sun" is the throne of David (Psalm lxxxix. 36). The "light" is the Law, in accordance with Prov. vi. 23.

The "moon," the Sanhedrin, which sat in a semicircle (*Mishn. Sanh.* iv. 3). The "stars" are the doctors of the Law (*Dan.* xii. 3). The "clouds," Jeremiah's prophecies, which came to pass "after the rain," the destruction of the Temple. *Verse 3.*—The "keepers of the house" are the Temple watchers. The "strong men," the priests, who could throw birds' מוראה and feathers more than thirty yards (*Zebach.* 64a). *Verse 4.*—On the "bird," see Vol. IV., p. 542. *Verse 5.*—The "almond" refers to Jer. i. 11. The "grasshopper" clause to the golden pillar of Nebuchadnezzar (*Dan.* iii. 1), which was being set up and kept falling down again and again, until they brought all the silver and the gold in Jerusalem, and poured them out before it (*Ezek.* vii. 19), to make a pedestal for it. The "caperberry" is the merit of the fathers [of the congregation of Israel, which is as a dove—read אבי היונה]. The man's going to the "house of his world" means that Israel were to go back to their own Babel, whence in the person of Abraham they came. The "mourners" are the captivity of Jeconiah. And so on to the end of verse 7. This exposition is in idea a perfectly legitimate application to Israel of what the Preacher says to the individual man, "Remember thy Creator," etc.; but in details there is no attempt in it to ascertain what was in the mind of "Solomon."

(2.) *Verse 2.*—"Sun, light, moon, stars," are the countenance, the nose, the forehead, and ראשי לכהרות, the summits of cheeks, which, according to Zeeb-Wolf, stand out from the face like stars. That the thick clouds "return after the rain," has two meanings, one for the cultured, one for the vulgar. The one is the continual watering of old men's eyes, the other בא להטיל מים הגללים ויוצאין ומקדמין אורה. *Verse 3a* refers to the failing power of ribs and arms. In *3b* the first clause is subdivided, "the grinders cease," meaning that digestion is impaired, and "because they are few," being said of the teeth. The "lookers out" (הראור) at the windows are either the eyes

or the *lungs* (הריאה). [But Loria thinks that *lungs* and *reins* should be transposed.] *Verse* 4 first describes by the *shutting of the doors to the street* the closing of the apertures of excretion, consequent upon the stoppage of digestion. The anatomy is then suspended, and "he shall arise at the voice of the bird" is taken to mean that the old man is disturbed by birds, which put him in fear of robbers; but the "daughters of song" are anatomically the *lips*, or the *reins*¹ (?), which supply the thought expressed by speech. *Verse* 5 begins literally. "They shall be afraid of that which is high," means that when old men are invited to a place they ask anxiously whether there are ascents or descents to be made. The "fears in the way" are the old man's doubts whether he is equal to the journey. The "almond" is the bone לוז (Arab. *lauz*, almond) in the spine; the imperishable part of the frame, out of which the resurrection body germinates. The "locust" means the fingers and the toes, the word קרסולין (Targ. Lev. xi. 21) denoting its limbs or "Spring-füsse" (Levy s. v. קרסולא). The man's going to "his long home," the house of *his* (not *the*) world, means that all pass indeed through one gate to the world to come, but every צדיק will have *his own* world or sphere there. The "mourners" are the worms, הרגלעים. *Verse* 6.—The spinal cord, the skull and the stomach are referred to. The *galgal* is either a wheel, as used at the wells of Sepphoris, or a clod.

A critical reader, coming to 1 or 2 without prepossession, would say at once that it was a merely Haggadic application of the passage. The Midrash does not profess to give the primary sense of Scripture. It does not care to

¹ It is said in *Berakhoth* 61a that a man has two "reins," right and left, counselling good and evil respectively (Eccl. x. 2). According to *Aboth R. N.* § 33, p. 94 (ed. Schechter), Abraham's reins were like two wise men, who instructed him in the night seasons (Ps. xvi. 7). See also *Aboth R. N.*, p. 160, and *Tanchuma* (ed. Buber), i. 60b., where an anatomical exposition of the *Dirge* passage is given.

tell us anything so obvious as that *בראשית* means *In the beginning*, but it tells us that it means *By the Torah*, which is *Wisdom*, which is *ראשית* (Prov. viii. 22). To the same category belong the Haggadic expositions of the Dirge passage. Nevertheless, scholars have followed one another in taking 2 seriously, accepting it as right in outline, if occasionally extravagant in particulars.

Referring to the commentaries of Graetz, Delitzsch, Wright, and others, and to Leopold Löw's *Die Lebensalter in der jüdischen Literatur*, pp. 253 sq. and 417-18 (Szegedin, 1875), for general information on the passage, I pass on to the further discussion of some points in it.

Verse 2.—Granted that the darkening of sun, moon, and stars might signify death, as in the Dirge theory, what (asks Delitzsch) could be meant by the clouds which “return after the rain”? The figure is in itself ambiguous. But, if “rain” was to be added to intensify the cheerlessness of the picture, a succession of clouds was, of course, wanted to perpetuate the darkness. This thought would come naturally to the writer of Eccl. i. 7. The returning thick clouds make a long night, corresponding to the “long home” of verse 5. “He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light” (Psalm xlix. 19). Clouds are the drapery of mourning in Isaiah l. 3, “I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering.” According to Delitzsch, “sun, moon, stars” mean the *spirit*, the *soul*, and the *five senses* of man, and the “clouds” attacks of sickness.

Verse 3.—“The keepers of the house tremble,” etc. This verse is a comparatively easy one for the anatomists, and they are fairly in agreement as to its details; but there are signs of confusion of thought in their enunciations of its main idea. “Knobel, Ewald, and Delitzsch consider the body of man to be here portrayed as a building threatened from within with impending ruin. Compare Job iv. 19,

and the Apostle's language in 2 Cor. v. 1, etc." (Wright). "Dieses Haus als dem Greise gehöriges *befindet sich nach allen Seiten in baufälligem verfallenem Zustande*" (Delitzsch). But there is not a word of this in the original. The inmates of the house are perturbed, or cease from work, or are in darkness; but its fabric and furniture are safe and sound. The doors are securely closed—not off their hinges; the windows are perhaps shut, but not dilapidated; the mill-stones are disused, but not broken or worn out. The anatomists make the *inmates* of the house members of the body, which they say is itself the house, or that and something more; for they add the "almond" and the "grasshopper" (verse 5), with the "wheel," the "pitcher," and the "golden bowl" (verse 6), to complete the body. Dr. Friedländer, in the JEWISH QUARTERLY REVIEW, Vol. I., p. 46, says rightly that what is described is the *change of the stir and bustle in a castle into stillness and lethargy*. But why this change? Because the master of the house "is going to his *beth olam*, and the mourners go about in the street" (ver. 5). Mourners in a house on the first day prepared no food *for themselves* (*Moed Kat.* 27b). This illustrates "the grinders cease."

Verse 4.—The "doors" shut to the street are *נקביו של דם*, according to a Darshan. Delitzsch objects that these would not be said to be shut *to the street*, and concludes that they must be the man's jaws, which, like Leviathan's in Job xli. 6, might be called the "doors of his face." These are closed "to the street," concurrently with the falling of the "voice of the mill," for the old man's toothless mouth shuts closely, and he can only chew feebly and with a subdued sound, "Er kann nicht mehr knacken, auch nicht mehr knappen und knarpeln (s. diese Wörter bei Weigand), man hört nur ein dumpfes Mummeln und Sabbern." In the *Dirge* I quoted, "*Dentes inter masticandum non strident ceu in juventute ubi crustas, ossicula, etc., fortiter ac sonore confringimus,*" as an example of the absurdities into which the anatomical theory had betrayed learned divines. Graetz

argues that the "doors" cannot be the lips, for these are not always closed in old men, "Klaffen vielmehr bei einigen Greisen." If the huge jaws of Leviathan are called דלתים, this does not justify the use of the same figure of speech for the small jaws or lips of men. The whole verse being on the subject of sounds the doors must be the *ears*. Change קול בשפל קול into בכפל קול, he suggests, and we get the meaning that, though the noise of the mills were redoubled, the old man's ears would be deaf to the sound. Take the "doors" anatomically in every possible sense, and it may be shown that none of them suits the context. The anatomist in *Aboth R. N.* (p. 6*n*) reckons up nine such doors in the body, which are all closed when the man *dies*.

The Bird.—ויקום...הצפור וישחו כל בנות השיר. Having made the inmates of the house (verse 3) symbols of members of the body in its decrepitude, the anatomists have to find a subject for יקום, "He shall arise"; and they say that it is the supposed *old man* who "shall arise at the voice of the bird," at the time when the "daughters of song shall be brought low."¹ The antithesis is not explained satisfactorily. It would give a better contrast and be simpler syntactically to make the *bird* the nominative to *shall arise*, if the intervening לקול allowed this. "The dove is a well-known symbol of lamentation" (Cheyne on Is. lix. 11), and bird-voices generally in the Bible are the opposite of cheerful music. *Bath kol* is said in *Berakhoth 3a* to mourn like a dove, as Zeeb-Wolf remarks on the Midrash, where the "voice of the bird" is made to be an ominous divine voice, which moved Nebuchadnezzar to arise and destroy the Temple. Wizards and necromancers "peep" or *chirp*, "and in the Babylonian legend of Ishtar the spirits are compared to birds" (Cheyne on Is. viii. 19). See in the New Testament, Rev. xviii. 2.

¹ Aben Ezra (Löw, p. 417) explains that the old man is *wakeful* because he takes *little food* (4*a*). On this account he is aroused by the slight "voice of the bird." His own voice becomes inaudible, "the daughters song" signifying the throat.

I am indebted to Mr. Schechter for the following references on the subject of birds. In Pirke R. Eliez. c. 21, Adam sees a raven burying a raven, and says, "I will do like the raven." Thus, remarks Loria on the passage, man was taught burial by means of the raven, according to Job xxxv. 11 מִלְּפָנֵינוּ...וַיַּמְעוּף כֹּה, "He teaches us by the beasts of the earth, and makes us wise by the fowls of heaven." The raven's blackness, he adds, is a sign of *mourning*. On the ominousness of the voice of the raven see *Shabb.* 67*b*, הָאוֹמֵר לַעֲוֹרֵב צִרָה, and *Tosephta Shabb.* § 7 (*al.* 8), Zuckerman, p. 118 (Trier, 1882), אֲזִיחֵהוּ מִנְחָשׁ הָאוֹמֵר...וּקְרָא לִי, עֲוֹרֵב.

Verse 5.—גַּם מִגִּבָּה יִירָאוּ כו'. Another subject has to be found for the plural יִירָאוּ. Some say "*Old men*," some "*The old man's thoughts*," *shall fear*. Graetz cuts the knot by reading יִירָאוּ for יִירָאֵה

Although the "almond," the "locust" and the "caperberry" should obviously be interpreted on one principle, the *almond* and the *locust* are taken anatomically, but not so the *caperberry*. Graetz, more consistently, would make this also an anatomical symbol, but again has recourse to conjectural emendation, rendering וְהִרְרֵי for וְהִרְרֵי. It is a defect in all the varieties of the anatomical interpretation that the anatomy is intermittent. It breaks off at "He shall arise" (*verse* 4), and again at "They shall fear" (*verse* 5), and generally at the "caperberry" (*ib.*), to be resumed inappropriately at *verse* 6. In the *flourishing* of the "almond" an allusion is often found to old men's white hair. To the objection that almond blossoms are *pink*, Bauer (1732) replied that they turn white before falling off. But if the almond-tree is a "Spiegelbild des winterlichen Greisenalters mit seinem fallenden Silberhaaren," as a writer quoted by Delitzsch suggests, some fitter sense must be found for וַיִּנָּחַץ, since to *flourish* is not to fade and fall.

The Grasshopper.—In the Parma Manuscript *Cod. de-Rossi*, 184 (fol. 69*a*), I find a version of the fable of the "Ant and

the Grasshopper," beginning, **אמ' ליה שושפויי לאנמלהוי** **הב לי מן חטוי**. In another version **טיטכוס** takes the place of **שושפויי**. But the latter, or **שושיפא**, is **מין חגב**, a kind of locust. See *Tosaphoth Chullin*, 65b, **ד"ה אלו כללי**. Therefore **טיטכוס** is a kind of "locust," and so *Chagab*, in Eccl. xii. 5, may mean **τέττιξ**. In the *Dirge*, p. 38, I remarked on Virgil's *raucis cicadis*, that it was to a person in a mournful frame of mind that the *cicada* sounded hoarse. Mr. Schechter adds from *Midr. Tillim*, c. 106, § 5, **דקרין לאבל קצפא**, the mourner is *irritable* and not easily pleased.

"*His long home.*"—**בית עלמו**. *Domus aeterna* in Hebrew, Greek, Latin, etc., means the grave (Wright, p. 436). The contrast with the house (verse 3), in which the man had passed his brief earthly life, agrees with Eccl. i. 4, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh, but the earth abideth for ever," where *for ever* does not deny the fact of the earth's "creation in time by God." His house, however great (Eccl. ii. 4-8), was not to be his abode for ever (Psalm xlix. 4). If this "house" meant the body, and if it were in the utterly ruinous condition described by Delitzsch (p. 8), it could only represent the body after dissolution had set in, and not during life. The פשט of the Dirge passage is not illustrated by St. Paul's saying, "For we know that if our earthly *house* of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an *house* not made with hands, *eternal* in the heavens" (2 Cor. v. 1), but may have suggested it as a דרש, in which the *beth olam* of the grave would naturally be changed, as in the Midrash (p. 6), into an abode in the *olam* to come.

Verses 6, 7.—"Or ever the silver cord," etc. Graetz well concludes, *Vs. 6 würde daher poetisch dasselbe ausdrücken, was Vs. 7 prosaisch ausspricht*. The subsection is complete in itself, and describes, first by symbols and then by plain words, the *dissolution* of the body and the return of the spirit to God. On the "wheel" I remarked in the *Dirge*, "Even if it were granted that a wheel was in use,

we might suppose גלגל to mean not the machinery for winding, but the thing moved by it." Compare the גלגל המייליי of *Ruth Rabb.* V. 9. The bucket either lets out the water or itself falls into the well through the breaking of the rope or the "wheel." In Kohut's *Aruch Completum* גלגל is said to have the meaning *gedrehter Faden, Schnur*. But if the *wheel* breaks and "bucket, rope, wheel, and all are precipitated into the well" (Wright), this gives all that we want, and something more.

CONCLUSION.

1. The anatomical interpretation of Eccl. xii. 1-7 is accepted by most modern writers. In the Midrash it competes on equal terms with the historical exposition, but neither is anything more than a דרש or *application*. To seek for a פשט also is quite legitimate, and implies no antagonism to the oldest Rabbinic tradition rightly understood.

Herzfeld describes the passage as a *mehrfach durchgebrochenes Aggregat unvollständiger Vergleichen*. Cant. iv. 1-5 and vii. 1-5 consist of such comparisons loosely strung together, and I grant that Coheleth *might* have written in like fashion. But what he did write in the place under discussion is evidently well thought out and logically expressed. Whatever it means, it is clearly an organic whole. Herzfeld's words, therefore, do not properly describe it; and if they are applicable (as will scarcely be denied) to its anatomical interpretation, I should infer that this does not suit the passage. Anatomists generally think of the "house" as the body, and deduce that it is in woeful disrepair (p. 8), from the fact that its inmates are perturbed.

2. The Dirge theory takes account of the structure and articulation of the passage, referring "*Ere* the evil days come . . . *Ere* the sun is darkened, etc. In the day when the mourners go about in the street . . . *Ere*

the silver cord be loosed," etc., to *Old Age*, the *Day of Death*, and the *Dissolution of the Body* respectively.

In the middle subsection notice the verbal correspondences *house, house* (verses 3, 5) ; *grinders, mill* (verses 3, 4,) ; *street, street* (verses 4, 5). These are at once accounted for by the Dirge theory, but present insuperable difficulties to the anatomists, unless they are content with a very partial application of their hypothesis. If one "street" (verse 5) is literal, why not the other, and then the *doors* and the *mill* (verse 4), and then the *grinders* (verse 3) ? If the first "house" were the body, the house of the spirit of man, it would not make a good parallel to his *beth olam*, the grave, which is the house of his corpse. All this points to the necessity of a literal interpretation of verses 3-5. Whether the Dirge theory be right or wrong, I venture to think (1) that the *Anatomical Interpretation*, unless it can be materially amended, cannot stand on its own merits ; and (2) that it has nothing else to stand upon.

C. TAYLOR.

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